

PortAmerica Access Road Bill Advances

By Sandra Sugawara
Washington Post Staff Writer

The House approved a bill yesterday that would allow the construction of a crucial access road from Interstate 295 to the PortAmerica project, a multimillion-dollar riverfront development planned south of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge in Prince George's County.

The bill, which was passed by voice vote, would transfer 55 acres of park land without cost from the federal government to the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The agency is responsible for developing parks and recreational facilities in Prince George's and Montgomery counties.

The land, currently under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, will be used for an access road, park and recreational purposes. It is adjacent to PortAmerica site, in the vicinity of the Capital Beltway, near I-95 and I-295 at the Woodrow Wilson Bridge.

— Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), who sponsored the legislation, said that the project, which is to include office buildings, restaurants, shops and expensive residences, will result in 9,300 jobs in Prince George's County and about \$2.5 million in annual tax revenues for the county.

Hoyer said that of all the bills he has worked on since coming to Congress, "there is not one bill that I can think of . . . that will have such a profound impact on the economy, the reputation and the future growth of Prince George's County" as the transfer authorization.

A Senate committee is expected to consider a similar bill in the next two weeks.

The County Council has already approved the development, but that approval was contingent on getting the federal land. Details of the project still have to be approved by the county planning board.

County officials also are trying to work out a plan for funding the access road, using a combination of money from the developer and state and federal sources.

The Interior Department said it had no objections to the free transfer of land. In a recent letter, Interior officials said they concluded that outright sale of the property "would provide only minimal revenue."

Test excavations at Oxon Hill nearing close

By **MARY ELLEN WEBB**
Sentinel Staff Writer

In a wooded, often muddy section of Oxon Hill, off Oxon Hill Road, archaeologists with the Maryland Geological Survey are trying to recapture pieces of the past.

The Geological Survey is winding up its test excavations in the area, close to the burned-out ruins on Oxon Hill Manor, to determine whether buildings associated with the manor — including a carriage house, a guest house, stables and slave quarters — are located in the area.

The manor itself was built around 1710, and was destroyed in a fire during the 1890s. All that remains of the massive, Georgian-style building are a brick basement-like structure and some marble steps that once may have led up to the building.

The test excavations were requested by the State Highway Administration (SHA), which has plans to construct a connector road between Indian Head Highway and Route 295 in that area.

“What we’re doing right now is testing the site,” said Maureen Kavanagh, an archaeologist with the Geological Survey. “If there is something there, we would recommend either a full excavation” or, preferably, that SHA not build the road through the area.

A full-scale excavation probably would not be conducted by the Geological Survey, Kavanagh said, but rather by a private contractor.

Silas Hurry, another archaeologist working on the project, noted that at this point, “we’ve found evidence for a lot of potentially significant buildings.”

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Excavation testing to end in two weeks

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The testing began last year, with four archaeologists working on the project for over four months. Nine archaeologists have been testing the area since September, and should be finished within the next week or two.

They are testing an area about 20,000 meters square, Kavanagh said, with small excavations at five- or 10-meter intervals.

Right now, Hurry and Kavanagh noted, they are looking for distributions of artifacts that might suggest that a building used to be there. Their only guide at this point is a topographical map drawn in 1863 that diagrams where the Oxon Hill Manor and its other buildings were.

One problem with the map is that it was created about 150 years after the manor was constructed, and so would not include buildings that might previously have existed on the estate.

Kavanagh and Hurry said they hope the concentrations of artifacts they find correspond to the buildings on the map, and about half of their findings have at this point.

Last year, the archaeologists found what they think are the remains of five buildings and a landscaped garden that fell within the proposed right-of-way of the connector road. Thus far this year they have found evidence of another seven buildings, and possibly three more.

"Some look like they could have been residences, some farm buildings," Kavanagh said. "These buildings span the entire time the manor was occupied."

In addition to looking for the remains of buildings connected to the manor, Hurry said they are



Archaeologists Kate Dinnel and Ed Otter with the Geological Survey are in the process of sifting dirt through the tripod contraption behind them.

also searching the area for remains of buildings that might have existed before the manor was built.

The archaeologists' efforts in many ways resemble detective work. They search for clues, in the form of such artifacts as thumbnail-sized pieces of ceramics. Sometimes the clues are even

more subtle — archaeologist Allison Coerper noted that a change in the color of the dirt can give important clues about a particular site.

Tobacco pipes are a good find when trying to date the time a particular area was occupied, said Hurry.

"They break easily," he ex-

plained, adding that most of the artifacts are things the former residents threw out. The archaeologists are also coming across pieces of other fragile remnants like ceramics.

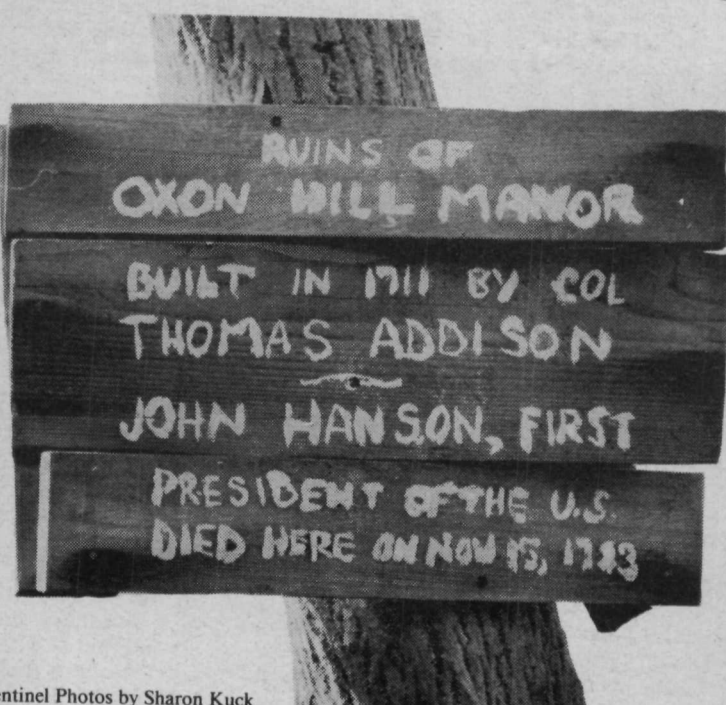
"Nails are another good indicator," Hurry said, and can be dated fairly well. Bricks, however, are no help, he added: "Bricks don't change."

While digging the rectangular test sites, the archaeologists sift all the dirt through a large sieve on a tripod, which helps them find some of the smaller artifacts. Thus far, the oldest artifacts the

"Sometimes," Kavanagh said, "you can figure out things *after* the tests are done for the day," by looking at the records and artifacts more closely. "That's what I like, is just figuring things out. There's always the process of discovery."

Although neither Kavanagh nor Hurry were certain when the Geological Survey would make its final recommendation on the site, Hurry noted that he would like to see the SHA avoid the area altogether if possible, because of the historical significance of the site.

"The area represents the high-



RUINS OF
OXON HILL MANOR
BUILT IN 1711 BY COL
THOMAS ADDISON
JOHN HANSON, FIRST
PRESIDENT OF THE U.S.
DIED HERE ON NOV 15, 1743

Sentinel Photos by Sharon Kuck

group has found are ceramics dating back to the early 18th century.

Every piece of information the archaeologists find is recorded, and photographs are also taken of the test sites.

est and lowest strata of society," Hurry said, referring to the possible evidence of guest quarters for

the manor, as well as slave quarters. "It is a rather important site."